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AUTHOR Harris, Gerald W.
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ABSTRACT

Recruiting students for the Oklahoma Northwest Area Vocational-Technical School (ONAVTS) is extremely challenging, primarily because the district covers 3,000 square miles of sparsely populated farm and ranch land with a feeder population of only 256 juniors and seniors available annually. To compete with a newly required high school graduation exit test and stiffer course requirements for high school graduation and college entrance, administrators at the ONAVTS stress how their vocational programs can contribute not only to the students' academic background through basic skill enhancement, but also to their career development and future occupational plans. The recruitment process includes the following: (1) every eighth-grade student in the feeder schools participates in a career exploration activity conducted by a vocational-technical counselor and involving an interest inventory with results shared with students and parents; (2) sophomores take the COPSystem (Career Occupational Preference System) Assessment (an ability test, interest inventory, and a work values inventory); (3) sophomores tour the ONAVTS campus, where they are helped to interpret that assessment and participate in learning activities using the Dictionary of Occupational Titles, the Occupational Outlook Handbook, and the Oklahoma Career Search database; (4) sophomores visit one or more programs of their choice; (5) an American College Test class is held for juniors and seniors; (6) ONAVTS participates in a county Career Night; and (7) a financial aid seminar is held to help parents fill out forms. (CML)

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Secondary Student Recruitment: Challenge for a Rural Area Vo-Tech School

Gerald W. Harris, Assistant Superintendent/Counselor
Oklahoma Northwest Area Vocational-Technical School
Alva, Oklahoma

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Secondary Student Recruitment: Challenge for a Rural Area Vo-Tech School

The Oklahoma Northwest Area Vocational-Technical School (OK NW AVTS) District covers approximately 3,000 square miles of sparsely populated farm and ranchland in northwestern Oklahoma; A campus at Alva (population 6,000) serves the northern portion of the district. With a feeder school population of available juniors and seniors numbering approximately 256, recruiting students for vocational education at the Alva campus is extremely challenging. Alva High School, the largest sending school, has 140 juniors and seniors while the other schools number: Freedom--15, Waynoka--31, and Carmen-Dacoma--16. Transportation is provided for these in-district students, and they attend OK NW AVTS tuition free. Students from two high schools out of the district (Burlington--18 students, and Cherokee--36 students) must provide their own transportation to attend vo-tech classes. With these low numbers of secondary students available in the vo-tech district, student recruitment techniques are especially important in keeping program enrollment numbers above the minimum

requirements of the Oklahoma Department of Vocational-Technical Education.

Oklahoma high school students (much like students from other states) have been hit with a deluge of obstacles to overcome in order to complete their high school education. Increased state graduation requirements, stiffer college entrance requirements, and a graduation exit test are contributors to escalating demands of junior and senior high school students.

To compete with these new requirements of high school students, we have worked hard to relate how our vocational programs can contribute to not only the students' academic background (through basic skill enhancement) but also career development and future occupational plans. Many of our secondary student's participation in vocational education is career exploration hence proving the importance of career development activities. Providing career awareness and preparing students for more training is a common occurrence at OK NW AVTS.

The recruitment process begins as every 8th Grade student in the feeder schools participates in a career

exploration activity. A counselor from the vo-tech school conducts the activity which also includes administering an interest inventory. A copy of the results is given to the student to take home and discuss with the parents. This 8th Grade career development activity helps each sending school maintain assurances required by the Carl Perkins Act.

As Sophomores, all students are given the COPSystem Assessment comprised of an ability test, interest inventory, and a work values inventory. This testing is conducted by the vo-tech school counselor at the home high school. Since only one of the six sending schools employs a certified school counselor, this service by the vo-tech has proven to be a timely source of career development for the students and a technique to foster good relations with the sending school personnel.

As each sophomore class visits the vo-tech campus for a spring tour, a group interpretation of the COPSystem occurs. As with the 8th Grade assessment, a copy of each sophomore student's results is handed out to be taken home and shared with the parent. The students participate in a learning activity using the

Dictionary of Occupational Titles and the Occupational Outlook Handbook. The students are then involved in a career development activity in the computer lab using the Oklahoma Career Search as a data base to provide occupational information.

After these learning activities and a short social break with our present students, the sophomores choose one or more programs to visit for approximately 45 minutes. During this visit, the instructors can relate specifics concerning program activities. The spring tour visit is concluded with a 15 minute recap and question/answer session. No pressure is placed on students to attend vo-tech the next year, but rather emphasis is placed on career decision making and working hard in classes at the high school. We strongly suggest to the students that planning their high school program, as well as programs beyond, is very important.

In feedback from the sending school administrators, we have heard positive remarks about the career development activities. Because of the limited number of certified counselors in the feeder schools, the emphasis on careers and basic skill

improvement has been appreciated. We provide a copy of the career assessment result not only to the student but also to the high school; the copy provided is placed in the student's cumulative folder for future reference. A copy is also retained by the vo-tech school in anticipation of the student attending.

Several other activities that contribute to a positive feeling about the vo-tech school include:

* ACT Preparatory Class for Juniors and Seniors;
* The Vo-Tech School's participation in a county Career Night;
* Financial Aid Seminar hosted by the vo-tech school to assist parents in filling out forms.

OK NW AVTS plans events and activities that facilitate student's career development while relating ways that vocational education can benefit them. Having the minimum numbers in each program is important; however, being an active participant in a student's career plan takes precedent. If vocational education can contribute to a student's future, then it is our goal to provide the information and direction needed. If vocational education is viewed by the student as a vital link (ie., basic skill application,

occupational skill development, or as a socialization factor), then the educational process is successful.

As a result of these varied recruitment techniques, OK NW AVTS has consistently averaged during the past five years approximately 30% of the potential juniors and seniors in our vo-tech district. This per cent is well above the state average of 23%; the 1990-91 figure of 29% served ranks number one of all vo-tech schools in Oklahoma. Hopefully, this is evidence of our efforts to stress the relevance of vocational education to the student's future career plans.

Secondary student recruitment in a rural vo-tech school is a challenging endeavor. By concentrating on career development activities and integration of basic skills with occupational training, many high school students in our district are realizing that vocational education is a necessary component of their educational program.